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ABSTRACT

Migrant children often do not get an adequate education due to such barriers as economic pressures to leave school; school personnel's negative attitudes toward migrant students; different programs, curricula, and testing practices over districts and states; and reduced access to special education services. Recently, special federal and state programs have provided for educational continuity, transferable records, and special accommodations for the education needs of migrant students. The Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS) has provided a computerized, transferable data base on each migrant student. Migrant education skills lists have enabled states and school districts to transfer student records in a uniform manner. Special education and migrant health services have been coordinated with migrant education programs. However, schools need to be encouraged to use the MSRTS more extensively and to work toward more reciprocity in the accrual and exchange of student education credits. At an August 1981 meeting, nine resolutions toward migrant student access, continuity, and achievement were adopted, i.e., coordinating state efforts to identify, recruit, enroll, and educate migrant students; developing a resource directory; improving and monitoring the MSRTS; disseminating information nationally on secondary programs; and involving migrant parents in their children's education. Six additional reading sources are cited. (NQA)

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39. Migrant Education

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39. Migrant Education

The Issue

The children of migrant workers in our nation often do not get an adequate education, even though their right to schooling is guaranteed by state constitutions, as well as by federal and state laws. A lifestyle molded by mobility and poverty results in intermittent attendance in several schools, often in several states, during the course of a single school year. In the recent past, migrant students have been helped by special federal and state programs that provide for continuity of education, transferable records and special accomodations for their education needs. Even so, their historical dropout rate of 90% is just beginning to moderate and now stands at about 70% in some states.

What Problems Do Migrant Children Face?

Recent studies have identified a number of barriers to completion of a full education program by migrant students:

- Economic pressures to leave school. Migrant families need the income that their high-school-age children can provide by going to work.

- School personnel's negative attitudes toward migrant students. Since migrant students seldom stay long at any school, and because they are often perceived as "losers," they do not get the attention and concern they need.

- Different programs, curricula and testing practices over districts and states. For example, classroom work done in one district may be tested in another. Migrant students in secondary schools often are trying to fulfill graduation requirements of a "home base" school with work done in several schools in several states.

- Specific state or local competency standards. While students who fail to meet these standards are often eligible for remediation, they may not be present in the testing school when the test-identified help is offered. Students who do pass these tests in one state sometimes have trouble transferring their passing grades to another state.

- Reduced access to special education services. Because of their mobility and attendance mostly in small rural schools, migrant students with health and handicapping conditions (more than most students) are not often exposed to special education programs. Moreover, migrant students who need bilingual education or compensatory education often do not have the opportunity to mesh special programs in these areas into their regular schooling.

- No continuity in health, housing and day care services as migrant families move from one community to the next. Communities provide these services at varying levels, from nonexistent to adequate. Few serious efforts are being made by communities to meet the basic needs of migrant families.

Have Migrant Students Been Helped?

With the enactment in 1966 of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (now Chapter One of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act), a migrant education program began to provide more continuity in the education of these mobile students. Funds became available to state education agencies for a variety of new programs, procedures and structures to help these students close their achievement gap. These funds provided incentives to school districts to identify migrant students and design specific programs for them.

For cooperation across districts and states, the Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS) was set up to provide a computerized, transferrable data base on each migrant student. Recently, the MSRTS, along with other migrant services, was improved through a a cooperative effort by MSRTS, the National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education and the Interstate Migrant Secondary Services project. The improved system began operation in January 1983.

The National Migrant Program has developed migrant education skills lists for states and school districts to use in transferring student records in a uniform manner. Courses, curriculums and instruction migrant students have completed are cross-referenced and computer-coded for quick access. Districts using this information can more easily place migrant students in appropriate classes. Preliminary returns of an ECS survey of 31 states and Puerto Rico show that all of these states are using the migrant reading and mathematics skills lists, and most of them are using the oral language skills list. The early childhood skills list is used less extensively.

In a few states, among them Washington, New York and Texas, the state education agency is working on coordinating special education and migrant health services with migrant education programs.

Career education programs and vocational education programs are offered to migrant students by some states. This instruction is tailored to the times students are available each day and the length of their stay in a given locale. But in general, these kinds of programs are limited by the degree of state commitment, the number of students to be served, and funding allocations.

How Can This Help Be Expanded?

While transfer programs and procedures are available, schools are not utilizing them fully. They need to be encouraged to use the MSRTS more extensively and to work toward more reciprocity in the accrual and exchange of student education credits, especially for secondary students. Recently, the MSRTS has expanded its record format to help with high school student credit accrual and exchanges. The data base now offers information about the high school graduation requirements specific students must meet and a listing of full or partial credit units each student has earned. Using these records, teachers and counselors in receiving schools

can gain a better understanding of what students need in order to graduate and how much they have already learned.

What Else Can Be Done?

National guidelines for migrant secondary student credit accrual and exchange are being recommended to federal, state and local decision makers by The National Policy Workshop on Education for Migrant Secondary Students. At an August 1981 meeting, nine resolutions toward migrant student access, continuity and achievement were adopted. Key elements and policy options of these recommendations are:

- Development by the National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education of policy recommendations for establishing reciprocity among districts; granting full credit for competencies; clock hours or proficiency tests; issuing flexible, fractional credits; accepting and transmitting course work; and accepting "home" school diplomas.

- Coordinating state efforts to identify, recruit, enroll, and educate migrant students; developing a resource directory, improving and monitoring the MSRTS.

- Requiring "sending" states to provide complete information on migrant students when they move to another state. While the MSRTS credit accrual form should be used as an interim record, permanent records should be expanded to include competency test results, language(s) of instruction, home school address and telephone, courses completed, graduation requirements, grades, attendance dates, etc.

- National dissemination of information on secondary programs.

- Appropriate testing schedules for migrants across states.

- Migrant parent involvement in the education of their children.

- Alternative education programs to help students get high school diplomas, such as the High School Equivalency Program.

- Assignment of a person in each state to oversee migrant credit accrual and exchange programs.

- Interagency cooperation within and among states.

A foundation for these recommendations and other improvements in migrant programs is being laid by a number of education-oriented organizations. ECS has adoped a policy paper supporting the recommendations of the Seattle National Policy Workshop for Secondary Migrant Students. The National Education Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers have adopted resolutions that recognize the need to address migrant student needs. Other organizations and individuals are encouraged to:

- o Support and/or adopt the National Policy Workshop resolutions.
- o Explain the need for and purpose of these policies and procedures.
- o Facilitate or arrange presentations of these recommendations, using the National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education as a resource.
- o Promote state funding for migrant education programs as needed.

What To Read

Ad Hoc Migrant Education Task Force. Patterns of Migrant Education in California. A report for the deputy superintendent for program. Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1980.

California Master Plan for Migrant Education. Sacramento: California State Department of Education.

Hunter, Bruce. "Effect of Minimum Competency Testing on Migrant Children." Denver, Colo.: Education Commission of the States, October 1979. Contact ECS Migrant Project for copies.

Gonzales, James. "Key Issues in Achievement of Educational Continuity for Migrant Students." Denver, Colo.: Education Commission of the States, August 1981. Contact ECS Migrant Project for copies.

National Policy Workshop on Education for Migrant Secondary Students: Proceedings Handbook. Seattle, Wash.: Washington Department of Public Instruction, August 1981.

Serrano, Vicente Z. "Mobility and Continuity: New Ways of Lowering Dropout Rates for Migrant Students Through Credit Accrual and Exchange.' Denver, Colo.: Education Commission of the States, 1982. Contact ECS Migrant Project for copies.

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